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### **State Fire Marshal Offers Tips to Keep Warm Keep Safe This Winter**

“This past weekend we had two tragic fires started by improper disposal of fireplace ashes. It was a terrible way to end what should have been a happy holiday weekend,” said State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan.

There were 928 fire incidents involving chimneys, fireplaces, and woodstoves in Massachusetts in 2009. These fires were responsible for two civilian deaths, six civilian injuries, 14 firefighter injuries, and resulted in \$3.1 million in property losses. These incidents make up 35% of all fires linked to heating systems.

Two elderly Plymouth residents were overcome by smoke from a fire caused by either the improper lighting or cleaning out of the wood stove in their living room in February, 2009.

It is important to use all heating sources safely. Here is some information on preventing fires from chimneys, or pellet stoves, which burn wood or coal products.

#### **Tips for Safe Use of Wood, Coal and Pellet Stoves**

Before you purchase a heating stove, make sure that it has approval from Underwriter’s Laboratories Inc or another recognized independent testing lab.

#### **Installation**

A building permit needs to be obtained prior to installation of fireplaces, fireplace inserts, wood, coal or pellet burning stoves and must be inspected by the local building inspector prior to their initial use as required by the [Massachusetts State Building Code](#).

- Allow at least 36 inches of clearance around the appliance to prevent combustibles from coming into contact with heat sources.
- Solid fuel heating appliances cannot share a common flue with chimney flues utilized by other solid, fossil, or gas fired appliances.
- A qualified mason should inspect the chimney and flue before the stove is used. Cracks in the flue or mortar joints can allow flames and heated gases to extend into the structure.

#### **Proper Use**

- Most chimney fires occur because of a build-up of creosote, a tarry by-product of burning wood. Have your chimney flue cleaned before each

heating season. Burn only dry, well seasoned, hardwood to reduce creosote accumulation.

- Don't use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Never leave children unattended near the stove
- Check that the damper is open before lighting the fire. A closed damper will result in an accumulation of smoke and carbon monoxide in the home. Do not close the damper until the fire is out and the embers are cold.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent flying sparks and embers from falling out on to the floor.
- Install and maintain smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms to provide protection for your family.

### **Install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms**

Install [smoke alarms](#) to warn of a fire, but also have [carbon monoxide \(CO\) alarms](#) in the home to warn about deadly fumes from a faulty furnace, fireplace and oven flue or other venting problem. Problems with heating systems is the #1 source of carbon monoxide in homes. Both types of [alarms](#) are required by law in Massachusetts.

### **More Information**

The Department of Fire Services has a tri-fold flyer on Chimney and Woodstove Safety that can be downloaded from its website at:  
<http://www.mass.gov/keepwarmkeepsafe>.

The [U.S. Fire Administration](#) also has information on fireplace and home fire safety at  
[http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/home\\_fire\\_prev/heating/fireplace.shtm](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/home_fire_prev/heating/fireplace.shtm).